

Maintenance Access Working Party

Meeting Report

On Monday 28 November 2011, Melbourne Water convened a workshop with key stakeholders to identify possible solutions to the ongoing maintenance of the Patterson Lakes Tidal Waterways. Maintenance is an essential service provided by Melbourne Water and is provided through utilisation of easement access points. The aim of the Working Party is to explore the potential solutions and identify a way forward that is sustainable, long-term and fully facilitates maintenance.

Working party members included representatives from the Patterson Lakes Advisory Committee (PLAC), Local State Member of Parliament Donna Bauer's Office, City of Kingston (Planning) and Melbourne Water (Developer Services, South East Region Maintenance/Minor Capital and Communications). Nicola Mendleson (Mendleson Communications) was engaged as an independent facilitator.

Purpose

Melbourne Water operates maintenance out of the Canberra Street site. This site has limited capacity to effectively manage deliveries and plant material for maintenance of the Patterson Lakes. Maintenance has the potential to be a contentious issue with Patterson Lakes stakeholders as some residents feel these activities have a negative impact on their quality of life. Conversely, other residents see maintenance as necessarily performed within the Tidal Waterways. Residents also have varying knowledge and opinion on the maintenance performed by Melbourne Water.

There is a lack of available land within the Tidal Waterways to conduct maintenance activities. Primarily this is due to increased development in the Waterways as well as issues around land use zoning. The City of Kingston's position is that only land zoned Public Use (PUZ1) be used for maintenance access to the Tidal Waterways. Any land zoned residential (R3Z) is unacceptable for storage of material. Patterson Lakes is primarily zoned Residential (R3Z) including the tidal waterways and associated drainage reserves.

Formerly, Melbourne Water used vacant blocks for temporary maintenance sites and access. Residents lodged complaints about the maintenance activity taking place with the City of Kingston who subsequently closed the sites, citing zoning restrictions. The combination of zoning restrictions, resident complaints and a lack of available land has increased Melbourne Water's use of the Canberra Street access point. While Melbourne Water receives ongoing complaints from the residents adjacent to Canberra Street, it is the only block of Melbourne Water land zoned PUZ1 that is large enough to be used for maintenance and minor capital purposes.

Melbourne Water has worked closely with community to alleviate concerns around use of the Canberra Street site. Measures implemented include restricting site working hours, limiting time

on site as much as possible, landscaping of site (including privacy shade cloth), use of a water cart to minimise dust and advance notice of work outside set operating hours.

Meeting Notes

Melbourne Water opened the meeting with a presentation on the minimum functional requirements of a Maintenance Access site and the Melbourne Water works barge and pusher boat. At the request of Melbourne Water, PLAC members gave presentations on residents' views.

1. First PLAC Presentation - Canberra Street site

- PLAC Member had visited Canberra Street site and adjacent houses; spoken extensively with residents.
- Reported resident experience of significant negative impact on lifestyle, privacy, and amenity.
- Lack of disclosure to new buyers that Melbourne Water easements may be used for maintenance as well as access.
- Maintenance is shared responsibility of community; plant and delivery site should not be permanently located at Canberra Street but either rotated through Tidal Waterways or outside residential areas completely.

2. Second PLAC Presentation – Maintenance Access Points

- PLAC Member had visited several easements and spoken to a range of residents.
- Noted visual amenity and landscaping of the sites needs to be improved; should be in keeping with residential aesthetics.
- Anecdotal reports of cracking caused in houses from vibrations of rock dumping at Canberra and Long Island Streets.
- Intensity of complaints depends on proximity to maintenance site and level of knowledge around Melbourne Water's maintenance tasks and schedules.

3. Third PLAC Presentation - Patterson River, Launching Way (Jetty Replacement) and Whalers Cove (Tidal Gates)

- PLAC member spoke extensively with residents around Launching Way and Whalers Cove.
- Reported residents upset about obstruction of water view, noise from depots and potential devaluation of property.
- Concerned about impact on surrounding services, i.e. site originally used as a car-park in summer for boat trailer overflow.
- Completion and decommission dates have been extended by Melbourne Water and residents are consequently distrustful of provisional dates.
- Reported residents have a poor view of Melbourne Water's communication around these sites. Feel information provided is incomplete and does not fully express impact of work on site. Would prefer doorknocks outside of business hours.

Overall, all residents seem to agree maintenance should be performed via access points or a depot may be required for the Tidal Waterways.

Discussion Points

The Working Party divided into two small groups to explore and discuss potential options. The following themes were discussed and action points generated.

1. Confirm Level of Maintenance

- Current level of maintenance is perceived as high through visibility of Melbourne Waters works barge and pusher boat and infrastructure upgrade programs such as the Tidal Gates and Jetties Replacement programs.
- Level of maintenance likely to increase as aging infrastructure is replaced and/or maintained.
- Discussed potentially intensifying maintenance works program so residents are less inconvenienced by ongoing work and experience maintenance work in a short, concentrated period.

2. Consideration should be given to Purchase Land

- Consider the purchase one or more blocks of land to reduce use of Canberra Street as the primary maintenance access site.
- This would require the rezoning of residential land. Melbourne Water policy requires that any land to be purchased would be subject to zoning which few sellers are likely to accept. Informally, Kingston City Council delegates advised the process to apply for rezoning takes approximately 18 months.
- Possible to do strategic planning, permit applications and rezoning simultaneously with City of Kingston to reduce timeframe and adhere to Melbourne Water policy.

3. Reduce Negative Impact

- Rotate barge mooring around multiple sites (including the marina, noting the additional cost) to reduce impact on individual residents.
- Reduce use of Canberra Street site by performing extraneous tasks from other easements. Whilst not ideal, it must be noted Canberra Street is the only available site in the Tidal Waterways to store plant and materials due to zoning restrictions.
- Use smaller, quieter machinery to perform maintenance. May necessitate additional purchase by Melbourne Water and may increase the number of times a barge is required to use the site.
- Perform fewer maintenance tasks in summer and intensify program in winter to reduce impact on residents. Melbourne Water advised not possible for the Jetty Replacement Program as this will incur additional cost as well as upsetting residents who are already concerned about delays. Melbourne Water will review whether more minor capital work such as rock work or beach replenishment can be increased in the winter months, noting that wet weather conditions may hinder the completion of regular maintenance tasks.

4. Advise Residents and Buyers of Easement Function

- Discussion revealed there is no practical way to notify prospective buyers (e.g. through Section 32 or Council overlays).
- Develop map of easements/maintenance sites for PLAC and Melbourne Water websites.

- Develop maintenance site signage further. Signage already in place on several easements, however, all sites should be identified as potential maintenance access points and list hours of operation as well as Melbourne Water contact details.

5. Communications with the Community

- Develop clear and specific message around maintenance and renewal activities.
- Communicate appropriately with different segments of the community. Participants noted Patterson Lakes is a changing community and residents have conflicting expectations. Newer residents seem to have more disposable income, are more willing to pay more for more services and see Patterson Lakes as a boating community. Many of the older residents are retired, with limited incomes, don't want to pay for more services and see the area as a waterways community.
- Communicate accurate timeframes and deadlines for renewal activities to prevent heightened expectations and consequent disappointment.
- Refine doorknocking protocol. While Melbourne Water reports a high level of engagement during doorknocks, it is clear some residents feel this is not the case. Suggested it would be more effective to confirm an appointment time with residents in advance of doorknocks.

The financial cost of any of these proposals will be funded through the Patterson Lakes precept rate. The precept rate is currently under review and may be increased in the near future. The maintenance strategy must consider the implications of limited funding.

Action Items

1. Melbourne Water will provide the long-term maintenance and renewal plan (overview of approximately 20 years). Melbourne Water noted this cannot be viewed as an actual plan as service delivery is regulated by the Essential Services Commission. Works are evaluated on a number of conditions including environmental considerations, efficient and effective use of resident funds and impact on residents' lifestyle.
2. Melbourne Water will explore the possibility of purchasing land for use as an additional maintenance site including the process of undertaking the strategic planning and permit applications for rezoning in advance with the City of Kingston.
3. Melbourne Water will investigate how maintenance activities could be managed to reduce impact on residents. This includes rotating barge mooring; splitting barge and boat in separate moorings; improving residential style landscaping (Canberra Street); informing residents when site will be used (Canberra Street); use of smaller, quieter machinery.
4. Melbourne Water will develop a map of the Tidal Waterways featuring all easements/maintenance sites for PLAC and Melbourne Water websites. Melbourne Water will further develop signage for easement/maintenance sites advising hours of operation and Melbourne Water contact details.
5. Melbourne Water will approach residents adjacent to access sites to investigate claims of internal cracking from vibration of maintenance work and material delivery.

6. Melbourne Water will supply PLAC members with an updated current Melbourne Water contact list.
7. City of Kingston City will confirm time-frame and process around application to rezone land from R3Z to PUZ1.
8. City of Kingston City will advise Melbourne Water on contact name and process for strategic planning application, permit application and rezoning simultaneously. City of Kingston will confirm that this will reduce potential 18-month rezoning time-frame.
9. City of Kingston will provide clarification on activities permitted under R3Z to permit use of alternative sites owned by Melbourne Water land. This has the potential to reduce use of the Canberra Street Drainage Reserve.
10. City of Kingston will provide Melbourne Water a definition of the three-metre easement in the Tidal Waterways and possibility of enforcement.
11. City of Kingston will provide feedback on storing Melbourne Water machinery at a City of Kingston maintenance depot.
12. Melbourne Water will investigate the feasibility (including cost analysis) of storing machinery at a City of Kingston depot.

The Maintenance Access Working Party will meet in early 2012 to review the findings from the action items. This will establish next steps in the process of finding a sustainable solution to performing maintenance in the Tidal Waterways.